

A common interpretation of the Parable of the Fig Tree in the Gospel of Matthew is that it represents the nation of Israel, and that its starting to blossom is a clear reference to the rebirth of the State of Israel in 1948, and the return of Jews from around the world to the Promised Land. Therefore, it is considered a powerful "sign of the times" of where we are on the prophetic timeline. Jesus said:

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.

So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.

Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

(Matthew 24:32-36)

But does the fig tree truly represent Israel in Scripture? Actually, if one takes the time to carefully examine the Word, he discovers that such a concept is without any real biblical support! In the Bible, Israel is more often likened to a vine or vineyard than anything else. To quote just a few examples:

I planted you as a choice vine (Jeremiah 2:21)

You brought a vine out of Egypt (Psalm 80:8)

My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill (Isaiah 5:1)

There was a landowner who planted a vineyard (Matthew 21:33)

In Paul's Epistle to the Romans, chapter eleven, Israel is also referred to as an "olive tree."

Occurrences of the Term

Concerning the term *fig tree*, it occurs numerous times in the Bible as an image for various things. In some contexts, it is used as a metaphor for dwelling in safety and prosperity:

During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, all of them under their vines and fig trees.

(1Kings 4:25)

Make your peace with me and come out to me; then everyone of you will eat from your own vine and your own fig tree.

(Isaiah 36:16)

On that day says the LORD of hosts, you shall invite each other to come under you vine and fig tree.

(Zechariah 3:10)

In other places, the fig tree, together with various other plants and trees, is used symbolically to portray an idea, because its fruit, or the loss of its fruit, or quality, was clearly visible:

All their host shall wither like a leaf withering on a vine, or fruit withering on a fig tree.

(Isaiah 34:4)

Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree, in its first season, I saw your ancestors. But they came to Baal-peor, and consecrated themselves to a thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved.

(Hosea 9:10-11)

The vine withers, the fig tree drops. Pomegranate, palm and apple, all the trees of the field are dried up; surely, joy withers away among the people.

(Joel 1:12)

In the Song of Songs, the fig tree is used symbolically, but, again, not about physical Israel:

The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance.

(Song of Songs 2:13)

Supporting the Case?

A passage of Scripture frequently used to support the notion that the fig tree does specifically refer to Israel is found in the Book of Jeremiah, where the Prophet is shown two baskets of figs, one good and the other bad.

The good figs represented the exiles from Judah. God would work for their good and would eventually return them to their land. The basket of bad figs represented those that remained in the land, that were to face judgement and destruction.

But this falls into the context we showed above, where the fig tree and its fruit are used because of their very conspicuous nature.

One Error Leading to Another

Not only is there no portion of Scripture that clearly identifies the fig tree as an image for Israel, such an interpretation has even caused some to claim that God has cast away the Jews completely in His prophetic plan.

This is based on Jesus' cursing the fig tree in Matthew chapter twenty-one, and the cutting down of the fig tree that did not bear fruit in Luke chapter thirteen.

Of course, this parable clearly applied to the impending judgement on Israel, but not because the fig tree had any special significance or was an emblem for the nation. Again, it was simply used to illustrate a point, just as, in other parables, other plants, trees or objects of nature are used.

And Another

Furthermore, those who suggest the fig tree mentioned by Jesus in Matthew represents Israel, also teach that "*this generation*" mentioned in that same passage refers to the generation that would see these things come to pass.

Since a biblical generation represents about forty years, it becomes clear why so many "prophecy teachers" expected the Lord to return before 1988! What damage to the credibility of God's Word this has caused!

All Doubts Removed

If there are still any doubts in the reader's mind, the parallel passage in the Gospel of Luke should settle the issue:

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you

can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near.

(Luke 21:29-31)

In other words, the fig tree is simply one of a number of trees. Jesus most likely used it to illustrate His point because, as we said, it was frequently used in the Old Testament because of the observable nature of its leaves and fruit.

It is also possible the Lord used the fig tree full of leaves to illustrate the point because He had cursed one earlier and the Disciples would still have the picture of it in their minds.

To conclude, Jesus is simply saying to look at the fig tree, or any tree for that matter. And just as you know summer is around the corner because the leaves have fully appeared, the same with all the prophetic signs mentioned previously. When they are in full bloom, He is at the door!